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April 2006

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Kapoun, Jim, "Creating a Library Logo for an Academic Library" (2006). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 76.

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Creating a Library Logo for an Academic Library

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The library at Minnesota State University, Mankato needed to update its logo, which was little used and had been created more 25 years earlier. It did not reflect the changes in technology and services offered by the library. This article discusses the importance of logos in conveying an organization's identity and describes the process of developing, producing, and implementing a new logo for the library.

A literature search yielded mostly information on logos for public libraries. Every article stressed the importance of involving as many staff members as possible in the process. We did a web search to identify logos currently being used. We contacted several colleges and universities who had a logo and asked about their design development process. Our discussions revealed several alternatives:

- Have someone in the library design the logo.
- Use your campus graphic design or publications office.
- Use your campus art department.
- Open up the design to the campus community and have a design contest.
- Hire an outside firm to design your logo.

We reported these options to the librarians and the library dean and suggested creating a library logo committee to determine which approach was most appropriate for our library. We also proposed a timeline for completing the project before the next major update to the library web page occurred. The proposed timeline:

- September 2003: Present information to the library staff on developing a logo and call for volunteers to serve on the committee.
- October 2003: Organize the committee. Review options and choose one that best fits our budget and time constraints.
- November 2003: Propose approach to the library dean. (November 2003)
- January - March 2004: Develop the new logo.
- April-May 2004(?): Unveil the logo.

The first task was to present information to the library staff on creating a logo. A Power Point presentation was prepared presenting various library logo examples. The next step was to present the goals of designing a logo. From casual conversations with the library faculty over the past year I had come up with the following goals:

- Attract attention, leave an impression.
- Create a look that is unique and distinctive
- Reflect the philosophy of service the library provides
- Promote a feeling of authenticity and professionalism [Susan Rappaport, 1985, 66-7]

The presentation then examined the existing logo, the floor was open for comments as to why we wished it replaced. Most of the staff thought it looked dated, some thought the font was too small, some thought it looked stiff, and finally the library decided to drop the term Memorial Library from its official title in favor of using the phrase "Library Services."

We next took a look at several logos currently in use at other academic libraries. They illustrated various aspects of logo design:

- Simple designs, usually in black and white
- Designs that reflected distinctive architectural features of a library
- The use of color
- Complex logos that incorporated all the elements above plus incorporated distinctive artwork [Gail Junion-Metz 2003,32]

We then reviewed the various logos used on our campus. Most of the logos on campus incorporated the university colors of purple and gold and some of them used the same font as the official logo of the university. The groups agreed that the multi-color logos did not have the best fit and indicated that the library logo should use the school colors. We had to

consider the use of a logo independent of the official university logo in order to understand how and where the logo can be used in the library. The independent logo can be used for all library promotional material, on the web page, and on library publications. The logo cannot be used on or for official business of the university, on business cards, or to represent the university in an official ceremonial manner. At the end of the presentation there was time for questions and answers. There was also formal call to everyone to join the logo committee and to make clear that this committee would be their best chance to provide input on creating and critiquing a design concept.

The staff had about a week to volunteer for the logo development committee. There was no cap on the number of participants. I offered the PowerPoint presentation to anyone who had not attended the logo meetings. I also followed up with a daily email reminder. Ultimately, seven library staff members stepped forward: two catalog librarians, library webmaster, acquisitions librarian, government documents technician, the library preservationist, and the college archivist. Our first meeting was held in early November and we quickly adopted the great name of the "Library Logo A Go Go Committee."

We began exploring by exploring the design development approaches we had identified earlier. To have the logo designed by a staff member would be the most cost-effective and would allow a library employee to showcase his or her artistic ability. After frank consideration of the interest and qualifications of the library staff, we concluded that no one was truly qualified to design a logo.

The second alternative was to use our campus graphic design and publication office. This option was more appealing. Although the cost would be higher (around \$1,500.00) than creating our own in-house design, the university's professional graphic designers would bring artistic talent and expertise to the project. In addition, they would be more objective than a library staff member.

A third approach was to use our campus art department. This might be less expensive in the long run and might be a good idea for a student special project. We learned from one of our committee members that a logo had been designed for a department a few years earlier by an art student, only to be pulled from use after the student wanted it copyrighted. We decided that this option was not workable because of potential copyright issues.

The fourth possibility was to open up the project to the entire campus community and sponsor a design contest. This looked attractive to the

committee for the potential public relations benefits. It could create excitement about the library and raise our visibility. However, several questions arose in our discussions that made it less appealing: Who would judge the entries? Would the judges understand the library's goals for a new logo? Would prizes be offered? What kind of rules would be needed (e.g., would there be a limit on the number of entries person)? And, of greater concern, what would we do if we did not like any of the contest submissions?

The fifth option was to hire an outside firm to design the logo. This option might be less demanding for the committee and we would certainly end up with a high quality, professional logo. However, having consulted a few local graphic design firms for price quotes we knew the cost would be much higher than the budgeted \$2,000 or so. Based on this analysis, we decided to ask our campus publications office to take on the design project.

Our next meeting was with the library dean and we presented our recommendation to use the campus publications office for the job. He agreed with our recommendation and gave us a budget of \$2,000.00. He also agreed to meet with the director of publications to negotiate exact costs on various aspects of the project. The dean's position at the university made this a more appropriate task for him than the committee.

Having selected a design approach and settled on a budget, the committee moved on to address the logo itself. Our next meeting was to have the logo design reflect the library's mission statement and goals. We also considered key physical elements of the library that might have promise as logo concepts. Some of our brainstormed ideas:

- A flame for knowledge (indicating mission of providing information and the goal of freedom of access).
- An open door, indicating the revolving door of the library's entrance (and access to information).
- Students (indicating our mission to serve the students).
- Mortar board with tassel (indicating students' attainment of knowledge).
- Campus fountain (reflecting the campus and indicating the mission of advancing knowledge).
- An open book (indicating knowledge and access to information).

- A globe (reflecting world wide access to information and promoting diversity)
- Image of fountains reflection in the library windows
- Library entrance.
- River and silhouette of state, reflecting region.
- Cave painting hieroglyphics design
- Fractal images of book(s).
- The art work on the atrium of the library
- Mandala design.
- Combined open book and fountain to indicate the flow of knowledge.

Next we outlined a series of features the logo must have in its design:

- Logo will include the term "Library Services" as part of the design, but the graphic image must stand alone without these words.
- Logo may either be enclosed in a circle resembling a seal or stand alone in some symmetrical form.
- Logo must be able to be displayed in color, black and white, and in reverse negative image.
- Prefer to incorporate school colors, although not necessary
- The logo must look good in either large or small formats and must be adaptable for both paper and web design.

During our third meeting we invited the library dean and the director of university publications to present the results of our brainstorming meeting. Upon review, we rejected the flame of knowledge because we felt it was similar to the university's logo. We thought that using human figures or students would be hard to incorporate cleanly and might produce a cluttered look. Using the campus fountain to reflect the campus and to indicate the flow of knowledge was not recommended by the director of university publications because many other departments use the fountain as a point of identification. The group rejected the idea of using any local or state designs as we wanted a more global effect rather than local.

We liked the idea of using the revolving door of the library's entrance along with an open book to indicate access. We all liked the concept of the open book (to indicate knowledge and access of information) and a globe (to reflect the mission and goal of world wide access to information and promote diversity). We also decided to let the graphic designers work with and create the size, shape, and colors associated with the logo. We were promised a first draft of design options in 14-21 working days. In January of 2004 we reconvened with the library dean and the graphic designer to review three design concepts developed by the publications department. Concept one was an open book with a globe rising out of the middle centered over the words Minnesota State University Mankato. The logo covered many concepts: open book, global reach, simple tag line, and soft coloring. Concept two had the same wording surrounding a more defined globe with a circle of books. This design was eye-catching , but the books gave it an unprofessional look, and, while the globe was nice, it looked more like a sphere than a globe. Concept Three used the revolving doors in the shape of a book with a globe moving out from the door and the words Minnesota State University, Mankato lined-up on the top with the words Library Services coming out of the doors below the globe. This design was appealing to the eye but we wondered if people would understand the revolving door. We also did not like the font used for the words. After looking at all three designs side by side, the simplicity of the first design was appealing, as was the font and wording. We asked the publications department to produce some variations on the designs with these suggestions:

- Define the globe more drawing in definite political boundaries of the continents.
- Change the font of the lettering from Arial to comic sans MS.
- Define the book more by highlighting the outer edges.
- Place the globe behind the book and have it rise half way above the book.
- Create a negative image with the logo in reverse and provide the image in an electronic format.

In about a month, the committee was presented with three design variations. As it turned out, we did not like some of the changes we had requested. We did not like the globe more defined over the book or the globe rising up behind the book. We liked the font change to Comic Sans MS and the additional highlighting of the book. The committee did suggest enlarging the book somewhat in proportion to the lettering. The touch up

was done by the next day and the graphic designer emailed the design to each member of the committee.



New Logo

In late February, a little more than six months after we began this project, the Library Logo-A-Go-Go Committee selected the final logo design. The image was presented to the dean in a letter that described how it met our objectives for a new library logo. Our recommendation was accepted.

Figure 2. Letter of recommendation

To the Dean of Library Services:

Last spring a committee was formed to explore creating a new logo for the Minnesota State University Mankato Library. As you know, we contracted with the Publications department of the university to create a series of concept designs. The committee now forwards its recommendation to you. After careful consideration we have chosen this design for your approval as it best represents our mission statement and library wide goals.

The logo is an open book which represents knowledge and information resources. The globe which comes out from the book is the library's ongoing commitment to educate and provide free and open access of information to the global community. The predominate words "Library Services" describes our main mission to the university community.

The logo represents the following library wide goals:

- Support the strategic priorities of the University in providing services and resources for a culturally rich and diverse campus community
- Develop and maintain appropriate **collections** of print, non-print, and electronic resources in support of ongoing University curriculum.
- Improve **access to information** resources through the use of tradition evolving technologies.
- **Educate users** in the identification, location, evaluation, and use of information resources.

- Support **freedom of access** to information.
- **Promote the Library and its services.**

Promoting the Logo

To build excitement the committee kept the logo design a secret to the library staff and campus community. We planned a series of events to introduce the logo first to the library staff then the campus community. First, a private showing of the logo to the library staff was arranged. A PowerPoint presentation was shown outlining the logo development process and it concluded with an unveiling of the new logo. The official introduction of the logo took place at the beginning of National Library Week. Special invitations to the president's cabinet and campus deans were issued. The academic dean and a few of the university deans attended along with library staff members and about 30 students. Using a flat screen projection system we unveiled the logo and the reception afterwards was complete with balloons, napkins, and cake all with the logo on them. Polo shirts embroidered with the logo were ordered for any staff member who wanted one. The flat screen projection remained up all day for patrons to view as they entered the library. The logo is now used on our library home page, public computer terminals, inter-office memos, and all study, reference, and instruction guides or publications. It has given us a fresh new look with a relatively low cost and helped us graphically depict the library mission. The logo committee achieved its goals, developing an image that will identify our library for years to come.

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